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Towards a theoretical framework on sensorial place brand identity

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper proposes a new framework on sensorial place brand identity.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This conceptual paper draws from sensory marketing and brand identity theories to propose an integrative model to develop sensorial place brand identity.

Findings: By relying on a broad spectrum of literature the study supports the notion that sensorial place brand identity is a bottom-up approach to branding that involves several enactment stakeholders and key influences as co-creators in the process of delivering sensory place branding messages based on a strong and unique place brand identity. This leads to the presentation of a provisional framework linking sensorial place identity, experiencescapes and multisensory place brand image.

Originality/Value: This novel approach to place brand identity follows a holistic approach by considering several enactment stakeholders and key influencers as co-creators in the process of branding a place through the senses.

Keywords: Place brand; sensory branding; multisensory experiences; experiencescapes; City Brands

Classification: Conceptual Paper

Towards a theoretical framework on sensorial place brand identity

Introduction

Research on place branding has gained much attention among academics and practitioners in recent decades, driven by the need to design effective place branding strategies to boost tourism growth and attract foreign investment as well as skilled and talented manpower (Kerr and Johnson, 2005; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004). In this regard, place branding has been recognized as a valuable and complex asset for urban development whereby relevant tools are used by local, regional and national stakeholders to distinguish places from each other and improve their positioning in the very competitive city marketing arena (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009). Thus, place branding is conceptualized as a governance strategy aimed at projecting images and managing perceptions about destinations (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013) to residents, tourists and investors.

The traditional approach to place brands is related to the overall culture, heritage, and other values that are represented by geographic locations (Beckman *et al.*, 2013), anchored on top-down managerial processes, in which destination managers act as creators and communicators to convey the brand identity to internal and external stakeholders (Kornun *et al.*, 2017). It is worth noting however that place brands result from an interactive and continuous process between private stakeholders, residents, and government and international organizations (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009) that contribute together to the creation of unique and distinct place associations, based on the economic, political, social, technological and cultural aspects of a particular place. Consequently, the main challenge that destination marketing organizations (DMOs) face today is to market a place that differentiates itself from competitors and reflects at the same time the common interests of public and private stakeholders. This challenge has significant implications on how place identity is strategically created by DMOs and communicated across multiple brand touchpoints (Rodrigues, 2018).

In the editorial of “Senses and the City”, Adams and Guy (2007) stressed the role of the human senses in forming and shaping the experience of the city, beyond its economic, political, social, technological and cultural dimensions. As Levy (1996, p. 165) noted human senses are so richly “interwoven in our experiences and form such complex gestalts that taking hold of them in a full relevant manner is a major research challenge”. Adams and Guy (2007) were very critical on the paucity of studies within the architecture of the senses domain that could

challenge the visual primacy. The authors stated that the most innovative research and thinking in the field of sensory studies was related to auditory studies, namely acoustic ecology, music and cultural studies. Although a stream of research has been conducted in the field of “sensescapes” focused on one or a combination of two senses, the multisensory experience of the city was a still recurrent but understated theme within national and urban policy, which raised key governance issues of how to design, plan and develop a city from a sensory urbanism perspective (Adams and Guy, 2007). In Adams and Guy’s (2007) opinion, the prioritization of visual experiences in a city is considered “sensual sterility” that is the root cause of an “urban malaise”. In an attempt to address this problem, Medway *et al.* (2016) advocated that place managers need to consider the nature and meaning of multisensory experiences that individuals have in various places. This holistic view of place branding stresses the relevance of exploring the sensuous dimensions of cities in modern life, by considering cities as sites of human experience comprised of memories, emotions and social relationships mediated through sound, smell, tactility, and taste, as well as sight (Low, 2015).

How the underlying values or characteristics of a place contribute to building its brand is still an area of increasing importance in academic research (Melewar and Dennis, 2014). Melewar and Dennis (2013) present a body of evidence that supports the role of experience in place branding with a growing call for theorization in the field of sensory place branding. It has been argued that experiences are perceived in terms of the five senses and can influence memories, emotions, preferences and consumer choices (Krishna, 2010). A place ambiance or ‘brand sensory profile’ (Dițoiu and Căruntu, 2014 p. 303) is created and experienced as a result of different and unique blends of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures and thermal conditions that resonate with our individual and collective memory (Dițoiu and Căruntu, 2014; Thibaud, 2011). For instance, Henshaw *et al.* (2016) investigated the role that smells play in cities’ distinctiveness and urban identity, through the creation of multi-sensory experiences based on the ambient smells of specific places. Therefore, it is interesting to stress that sensory aspects of destinations have been pointed out as significant dimensions that can create positive tourist experiences (Agapito *et al.*, 2014; Ghosh and Sarkar, 2015) and thus impact on how tourists perceive places as unique and appealing, facilitating new and enjoyable experiences. In a recent empirical study, Barnes *et al.* (2014) found that the way tourists’ wants and needs are addressed (tourists’ outcomes) is primarily driven by sensory experiences, which highlights an underlying desire to fulfill their hedonic needs. Moreover, if a destination is successful in making itself distinct and discernible, the sum of place brand experiences will influence positively tourists’

impressions towards the destination and their intention to revisit it (Cardinale *et al.*, 2014). Based on the previous discussion, assuming that tourists are deeply attracted towards places that stimulate their senses, the question is raised of how DMOs should build a strong sensorial place identity and then brand it.

Drawing on sensory marketing and brand identity theories, this paper delves into the significance of the sensuous city through the architecture of the senses, and proposes an integrative model to develop sensorial place brand identity. This novel approach to place brand identity follows a holistic approach by considering several enactment stakeholders and key influencers as co-creators in the process of branding a place through the senses. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. A review of the relevant literature identifies streams of research in hedonic consumption and multi-sensory perception, particularly in respect of city branding and identity. A theoretical framework on sensorial place brand identity is then developed, along with research propositions and recommendation for future empirical research.

Literature review

Before considering the specific concepts identified in our framework, it will be useful to discuss the more general issues in the extant literature relating to conceptualisations of place, place branding and place identity, place brand identity, and also the relevant literature on marketing and the human senses.

Conceptualizing Place

Place has been approached and researched by scholars in many distinctive ways and the term is often used interchangeably with space (Skandalis *et al.*, 2017). Creswell (2004) identified three approaches to place, namely descriptive, social constructionist and phenomenological. The phenomenological approach conceptualizes place as a way of looking and sensing the world, as the experience marker of our existence (Skandalis *et al.*, 2016). In other words, it views place as a platform of action from a physical, historical, cultural and social perspective (Skandalis *et al.*, 2017). According to Spielmann *et al.* (2018, p. 652) places are conceptualized as “contextual environments located in geographic spaces where consumers make decisions, interact, perform, recharge, and escape”. As such, places contain tangible, symbolic and sensory components (Spielmann *et al.*, 2018) that add value to the consumption experience. Such a phenomenological conception position place as an active locus of meanings and as a

platform where users' lived experiences take place (Skandalis *et al.*, 2017). In another stream of research, Visconti *et al.* (2010) highlighted the performative role of human agency in the public consumption of place. Moreover, the co-creational role of space has been highlighted by Vicdan and Hong (2018) who recently draw attention to how different stakeholders dynamically and collectively create and transform space as well as how the transformative space influences the actions and relationships of its stakeholders. More recently, Giovadarni and Lucarelli (2018, p.156) questioned the "view of place as a limited portion of space" as a marketing spatially-oriented perspective that relies on the conceptual division of place and space. Alternatively, they propose a combination of geographical appreciations of spatiality that incorporate openness, boundedness, expressivity and functionality. This perspective is aligned with the social-geographical notion of space, in which meaning and experience merge as a result of the interplay between people and their environment (Cresswell, 2012) and goes beyond the notion of space as a location (Agnew, 2011). By deconstructing the notion that place is interchangeable (Skandalis *et al.*, 2017), it sheds light on the need to view spatiality as related to experiences, its interpretation and the appropriation of the space in the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

The spatiality of the city can be divided into four types of spaces: public, market, segregating, and emancipating (Castilhos and Dolbec, 2018). This typology of spaces provides a heuristic view of the roles that different market actors play in the production of different types of places. Interestingly, marketers are pointed out as central actors in the production of market spaces, whereas regulators are considered key gatekeepers in public spaces. Additionally, consumers are considered protagonists in organizing emancipating and segregating spaces as they are supposed to define the consensus around which such spaces are constructed (Castilhos and Dolbec, 2018).

Place identity has been conceptualized as "an individual's sense of the self in a physical environment" (Lee *et al.*, 2015). As such, it is portrayed as a dimension of self-identity, which defines 'who we are' in relation to 'where we are' (eg. Tuan, 1975; Proshansky, 1978; Prohansky *et al.*, 1983; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996; Antonsich, 2010). Lee *et al.* (2015) have investigated place identity in the context of shared physical space, i.e. the consumers 'place of residence. Five dimensions were used to measure place identity (attachment, perception of familiarity, continuity with the past, cohesion and commitment) by capturing the psychological and emotional bonding with a place. In other

words, it measured a person's sense of belonging and connectedness with a place, which results on a sense of uniqueness and individuality (Lee *et al.*, 2015). By immersing into the life of a place, residents become infused with its distinctiveness and unique characteristics and the place at the same time that it also becomes symbolic of the resident's social experience.

As such it is the place itself that is being consumed by those using it (consumption of place) However, consumption also happens of goods and services experienced by place users (consumption in place) (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008; Skinner, 2011). A very useful distinction between these two concepts is provided by Chatzidakis, McEachern and Warnaby (2018), explaining that space tends to form 'either the background setting, or the object, of consumption activity' whereas place is 'a unit of space that has discrete boundaries, usually distinguished by cultural and subjective meanings, through which it is constrained and differentiated' (p. 150), with the authors further clarifying that 'all consumption is *in* space and place' (p. 152). This article considers both concepts to be relevant as we propose the importance of branding places as multisensory experience spaces that can both be consumed and act as a locus of consumption.

Place branding

It is commonly accepted that the process of branding a place is similar to that of branding a product or a service. In fact, when services or products are branded, names, symbols, signs or other distinctive brand elements are used to distinguish them from their competitors and thus help to form a unique and strong brand image (Keller, 1993). Likewise, when a place is branded based on its distinguishing and discernible characteristics the mental perception of its target audiences towards the place (i.e. brand image) will be stronger and more positive. In this regard, the place brand has been mainly linked to the overall heritage, culture, and other values that the geographic location represents (Beckman *et al.*, 2013), thus excluding most of the times its sensory characteristics as distinctive brand elements.

City branding is conceptualized as 'a subfield of place branding that stresses the branding and marketing of a city to local residents, tourists, and future residents (Beckman *et al.*, 2013, p. 647). Currently, cities are striving more to create place distinctiveness (Truong *et al.*, 2017) in order to boost tourism growth and attract investors and residents (Morgan and Prichard, 2004; Cai *et al.*, 2014).

Cities have been proposed as scenarios that entail a plethora of aesthetic experiences that can be created and managed in order to convey an appealing place brand identity (Alves *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, it is suggested that cities should be planned as experiences that generate long and lasting memories (ibid) as a result of sensory, emotional, intellectual and behavioral place brand experiences (Agapito *et al.*, 2014). When it comes to perceiving and experiencing place brands, it is claimed that a unique brand image strengthens the potential overall perception of a place (Tsai and Wang, 2017). Accordingly, the roles of gastronomy (Hornig and Tsai, 2012; Okumus *et al.*, 2013; Silkes *et al.*, 2013), culture (Derrett, 2003a, 2003, b; Scaramanga, 2012), and mega events are highlighted (De Noni *et al.*, 2014; Knott *et al.*, 2015; Larsen, 2014) in creating a distinct place image. However, empirical evidence shows that the process of branding a city results in most cases from a top-down approach that is controlled by governmental agencies (e.g. London, Paris, Barcelona, among many others) which set limits to how a city could be designed and promoted as an active locus of experiential meanings mediated by the human senses.

Place Brand Identity

According to Botschen *et al.* (2017), place brand identities are conceptualized as unique combinations of social-cultural meanings that result from multiple place experience touchpoints. In this context, it can be argued that a plethora of private and public stakeholders are key elements in the formation of place identity at the same time as they project the place image. Consequently, it is argued that place identity can increase the sense of belonging to a place while at the same time allowing place users visitors to reflect their self-image (ibid).

There are various brand identity frameworks in the extant literature. Drawing on Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000) brand leadership model, Konecnik and Go (2008) explore the concept of place brand identity from the supply-side. The authors propose a new theoretical framework for developing place identity illustrated by the tourism brand Slovenia, which highlights the significant role of local Slovenian residents as an effective means to support Slovenia's tourism branding campaigns. Some years later, Balakrishnan (2009) advocated that place branding is a long-term process that requires focus and commitment in terms of people, resources and time. Consequently, this identity-based approach moves away from conventional brand elements and integrates branding at a strategic level, by suggesting that branding a place revolves around five key place brand components: vision and stakeholders management, target customers and

product portfolio matching, positioning and differentiation strategies using brand components, communication strategies and feedback and response management strategies.

In another stream of research, Ruzzier and de Chernatony (2013) develop a dynamic identity-based approach to place branding theory that has its roots in the sociology and marketing tourism theories towards a framework that proposes a coordinated and holistic approach involving key influencers and enactment stakeholders in branding a place. The model combines general brand identity elements from de Chernatony's research (vision, personality, values and distinguishing preferences as a key aspect of positioning) and two additional brand identity elements (mission to guide countries' future directions, and benefits that enable countries to attract stakeholders and there differentiate from other countries). According to the authors, brand identity elements constantly interact in order to fulfil the brand promise, which is achieved through the place brand's functional and emotional values that create the experiential promise. Moreover, this place brand identity model is grounded in the community-based branding framework developed by Cai (2009) and stresses the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of encouraging long-term relationships and interdependence among influential stakeholders and key enactors to deliver the country's brand promise. This view is supported by Kavartzis and Hatch (2013) who drawn upon the organizational identity model proposed by Hatch and Schultz (2002). The authors argue that the true nature of place branding lays in the dialogue and interaction among several stakeholders and highlight the involvement of local communities as the most authentic manner to express the real soul of a place.

One common denominator of these frameworks (Aaker, 2012; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 2012; Upshaw, 1995) is that brand identity is postulated as an inside-out and top-down managerial process, in which brand managers act as creators and communicators to convey the brand identity to internal and external stakeholders (Kornun *et al.*, 2017). More specifically, the brand manager's role is to specify clearly the brand's meaning (sender's side) and to ensure that consumers internalize the brand information (receiver's side) (Kapferer, 2012) from which they then form their perceptions of the place brand image (Skinner, 2008). Another stream of research advocates a bottom-up approach to place branding as a means of involving all place stakeholders as co-creators in the process of branding a place in an ever increasingly dynamic environment (Aitken and Campelo, 2011; Rodrigues, 2018). This view is supported by Silveira *et al.* (2013) who propose an innovative brand identity framework grounded on the idea that place brand identity is dynamic and constructed over time by the place's various stakeholders.

Notwithstanding that scholars propose other identity-based approaches to place branding theory, such prior models are very limited in their approach to building and developing place brand identity.

Illustrated through the case study of a marketing consortium of several rural counties in the state of New Mexico in USA, Cai (2002) proposes a place brand identity model which is centered in building identity through spreading activation. The model suggests dynamic linkages among the 3As (brand element mix, image building, brand associations) and the 3Ms (marketing activities). Additionally, it is proposed that spreading activation takes place under four conditions (4Cs) of existing organic image, existing induced image and positioning, destination size and composition, and target markets. The model is enhanced by Cai (2009) who stresses the relevance of different stakeholders, their interdependences and long-term relationships along all the stages of place brand identity development.

The more dynamic identity-based approaches to branding opposes the traditional identity approach which is anchored on the creation of the visual identity (i.e. destination logos) and marketing communication efforts (i.e. catchy destination slogan and promotional materials). Furthermore, it sheds light on the need for a holistic approach to brand identity including all the senses. Against this background, we therefore propose that a place brand that holds a strong sensorial brand identity will impact positively on the place image and elicit strong emotional responses.

Sensory marketing and the human senses

There are various ways of classifying and counting the senses. The most common perspective of counting the 'sense organs' tends to lead to a count of five senses, sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch (from this perspective the skin is therefore counted as one sense organ even though it is acknowledged as containing at least 15 separate sensory mechanisms). The 'objects' view of the senses considers 'which perceptions count as of different senses in virtue of the kind of objects they are perceptions of' (Nudds, 2004, p. 36). However, there are problems associated with this perspective considering the vast number and types of different objects that may be perceived, and that these objects can be perceived only through the sense organs, and possibly by a combination of sense organs at any one time. For example, when we pick up an object we may see and touch it at the same time, thereby perceiving two simultaneous sensory experiences that we may not necessarily perceive as distinct from each other, rather we consider

it as one experience with two (visual and tactile) sensory dimensions. A third ‘experiences view’ of the senses considers that ‘we can distinguish the senses by appealing to the properties of experiences’ (Nudds, 2004, p. 41). For example, if we describe something we have seen we tend to describe its visual aspects. This perspective is also not without problems, as it is found that even when describing a distinctly visual experience, individuals do not limit themselves to describing only the visual nor do they limit themselves to the use of only visual language to describe the experience. The emphasis on language in such studies is based on the proposition that ‘if two people are discussing a holiday, the content of the conversation is the holiday. How language is selected and the aspects of the holiday that are focused on when communicating to the other person will be a function of each person’s meta programmes. A person with a visual preference would use more visual language whereas a person with an auditory preference would use more auditory language’ (Brown, 2002, p. 81). When considering the value of the study of language in sensory based terms, arguments tend to be based on the proposition that individuals communicate using either one of three dominant representation systems: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. So, although we as human beings have the required *capacity* to process the information we receive *through* our five senses *by* all five, we tend to use one sense to internally process the external event as a preference. Our *preferred* sensory representation system (PRS) will tend to be used to recreate any event irrespective of whether the experience involved pictures, sounds or feelings. When considering the generally held belief that an individual has five senses, Nancarrow and Penn (1998) note that the olfactory and gustatory senses are evidenced much less frequently as an individual’s PRS than the other three dominant representation systems.

Nudds (2004) proposes that the actual count of the senses is of less importance than the realization that, even though the concept of the five senses is one that could be considered mere ‘folk psychology’, it is this folk psychology that makes the count of five senses to be most significant, as that is the way the majority of people understand the world around them. It is therefore this significance of distinction between one of the five senses and another that ‘exploits the fact that we perceive objects in different ways ... In distinguishing different senses we are distinguishing different ways of perceiving: the senses just are different ways of perceiving things’ (Nudds, 2004, p. 45). The counting question is then answered accordingly – ‘if the senses are ways of perceiving we can explain the widespread nature of the distinction we make between *five* senses as being a consequence of the existence of a convention to individuate ways of perceiving in a certain manner, and our judgements involving concepts of

the senses as being true in virtue of such a convention' (Nudds, 2004, p. 48). For this reason, this paper considers the five senses when discussing the sensorial brand identity.

The human senses have been investigated from a holistic and multi-disciplinary approach, that views human senses as shaped by anthropology, geography, sociology, politics and consumer behavior. From a "sense-as-organ" perspective, it is interesting to stress the relevance of vision as the predominant sense in apprehending the world that surround us and that allows to express our feelings and emotions. As such, one of the most prominent themes in the literature about the senses in history is the separation of sight from the other senses in modernity. Indeed, in premodernity the senses were considered as a set, and each sense was correlated to a different natural element: sight to fire and light, smell to vapour, hearing to air, touch to earth, and taste to water (Howes, 2005). This architecture of the senses, as integral to the epistemology and ontology of the universe, changed during the Enlightenment, when the vision was associated with reason. At the same time, the rationalization of the modern society became identified with the increasing visualization of space and society (Howes, 2005). In the domain of architecture, the visual landscape planning was investigated from a sensory perspective and its links to urban attractiveness has been explored (Robert, 2018). Pallasmaa (2012) for example proclaimed that the "architecture is the art of reconciliation between ourselves and the world, and this mediation takes place through the senses". Haptic architecture, as anticipated by Aalto and theorized by Pallasmaa (2012), is a good example of "sensory realism" (Howes, 2005), by combining plasticity, tactility and intimacy in sensuous architectural structures.

From a "sense-as-culture" perspective, human senses are identified as sources of the cultural experience and consequently the relations between them are socially created leading to a sensuous experience (Howes, 2003, 2005; Portello et al., 2010). In other words, the sensorial dimensions are experienced individually, dynamically and socially (Scott and Uncles, 2018). In various ways, the five senses are therefore imbricated in mediated cultural practices driven by technology, local epistemology and discourse (Porcello *et al.*, 2010) and politics (Niedhart, 2003). Furthermore, anecdotal evidence shows that cultures differ considerably in their sensory values and norms, which are learned via primary socialization (Synnot, 1993). For example, southern Europe, Greek and Latin American cultures are described as more touchy-feely cultures when compared to Japan, North American and China (Synnot, 1993). Furthermore, the human senses may also be used to reflect ideological, social and political changes that impact on how people experience different spaces of culture. An outstanding example is

described by Niedhart (2003) and Śliwa and Riach (2012) on how a new olfactory and auditory regime has also taken shape in the wake of the carnival revolution of 1991 in Russia and the post-socialist transition in Poland, thus leading to different everyday practices and sensory perceptions.

The domain however in which the human senses have been intensively researched is the “senses-as-experiences”, with a focus on consumer research and the branding (Krishna, 2010; Hultén, 2015; Spence *et al.*, 2014; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Sensory marketing has been defined as ‘marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior’ (Krishna, 2012, p. 332). As marketing’s focus shifted from the product and service to the creation of memorable and unique brand experiences, sensory marketing gained wide relevance in engaging consumers emotionally (Hultén, 2015). It is commonly accepted that the human senses elicit emotional responses to services, goods and the environment, with the sense of sight considered the most powerful in detecting changes in the world that surround us, and the sense of smell triggering the strongest memories (Hultén, 2015; Krishna, 2012). As such, the brand’s appeal to the five senses allows consumers to experience the brand more profoundly and establish a deeper emotional connection (Lindstrom, 2005).

Sensory branding and place brands

Chakravarty (2017, p. 1533) defines sensory branding as ‘an approach through which marketers create better experience of brands’, stressing that ‘senses play a vital role in human life. We understand almost everything in life through senses’. Chakravarty also recognises that our senses can evoke strong emotions, especially when linked to memory. Sensory branding therefore can provide much enriched consumer experiences, and create a way for consumers to distinguish between various brands, while also connecting consumer emotions as a way to better foster brand loyalty.

Hultén’s (2017) sensory branding model proposes that all five senses should be targeted and carried through the service environment and the brand itself to impact on ‘consumers’ affections, cognitions and purchase behaviour’ (p. 284). While recognising the cultural effect on sensory symbolism, along with individual preferences for various sensory stimuli, Hultén stresses that although ‘sensory perceptions are culturally specific ... emotions are universal’. Thus, for product and service brands ‘brand managers developing sensory branding strategies should focus on the content and meaning of the local culture’ in which the brand is sold (Hultén,

2017, p. 290). Such strategies cannot therefore be universally followed for place brands, where the local culture forms part of the brand that is to be consumed, while its consumers, especially when considering tourism destination brands, may be visiting from a wide range of different countries and cultures.

Sensory branding thus invokes the ‘feel factor’, and the concept is ‘based on the idea that consumers are most likely to form, retain and revisit memory when all five senses are engaged’ (Chakravarty, 2017, p. 1544). As such, sensory branding appeals much more to the concept of the consumer as an emotional rather than rational and logical being. Yet while there is plenty in the extant literature regarding visual and auditory branding, less attention appears to have been paid to branding around the other senses, and even less in the literature regarding the way places may engage with their users on a sensory basis.

Some attention has been paid to sensory branding of places. For example, Cowan and Steward (2007) described cities as sensory environments and sites of habitation that generate their own distinctive sounds and smells, and are full of tactile and visual stimuli infused of symbolic meanings. Additionally, Low (2015) debated the sensuality of a city by explaining that the city life is comprised of everyday rhythms, events, routines and multiple un(expected) urban encounters that bombards our senses. Moreover, Cartier and Lew (2005) refer to touristed landscapes as places where tourists and locals seek for attraction, desire and ultimately experiences that derives from visual, aural, haptic, flavorful and olfactory place qualities. The multi-sensual apprehension of landscapes has also been debated from a geographical perspective by stressing the role of human senses in daily experiences of space and place (Rodaway, 2002; Edenor and Falconer, 2012).

Aziz *et al.* (2014) also described Turkey as a sensory destination brand for both visitors and those who had never visited. The study finds that ‘participants have sensory brand associations of Turkey through smell, taste, sound, and sight. The most frequently mentioned associations are scent and taste of food (47%), the sounds of busy urban areas (31%), the call to prayers (26%), and architectural sights (29%)’ (Aziz *et al.*, 2014, p. 77).

Towards a theoretical framework on sensorial place brand identity

The remainder of this literature review will focus on the various elements in our proposed sensorial place brand identity framework, and how each of these relate to the other.

As mentioned in the introduction to this article and above, place branding is a strategic process of creating and communicating a strong, positive identity about a place that differentiates it from other places. While many stakeholders can be involved in the process, the strategy, especially for urban places, is often charged to the city's DMO. However, as has also been identified in the introduction to this article, place brand identity has so far often concentrated on the visual senses rather than employing a more holistic sensorial approach to the place's identity as proposed by our framework.

Sensorial Place Identity

Most of the extant literature on sensory place branding focuses on how the place brand is communicated through visual stimuli including any place icons or place brand visual identity (logos etc.), and the sense of place evidenced through food and drink that focuses on the gustatory sense (Berg and Sevón, 2014; Melewar and Skinner, 2018). Berg and Sevón (2014, p. 230) also note that the gustatory sense is often targeted 'as an important element in making cities appear as attractive destinations to visitors elements of food, beverages and gastronomy are used frequently as elements of city branding'. Products bearing a place brand name or identifiable visual features 'used to represent a place in logo form' can be seen as the place brand's merchandising (Medway, 2015, p. 191). Medway (2015) offers examples from places strongly associated with food, such as the Italian city of Parma, where the place is 'promoted through incorporation of its toponym' in products such as Parma Ham, and the Aqua di Parma fragrance. This perspective is in line with Cowan and Steward's (2007, p. 2) view of the city as "sensuous encounters between individuals and environments ... produced and structured, not just by their material features, but also by the particular cultural and social contexts in which encounters take place".

In a recent article, Canniford *et al.* (2018) explored how smell constitutes meaning, identity and temporal experience in spatial assemblages. Extending on theorizations of product and ambient smells, the authors propose a framework to guide knowledge of sensing, practice and management of smell and space. In this context, they propose spaces of consumption as

multisensory in which micro and macro-level smells interact in space. The authors also suggest that “managing, manipulating, and selling the smell of specific locations represent a new way to territorialize and colonize space.” This new approach to place identity suggests that all the human senses interact in the shared physical space and may contribute to sense of belonging and connectedness with a place. In this regard, we posit that the place brand identity includes sensorial elements which are intrinsic to the place and are part of the locals’ daily activities and environment or may be staged strategically by urban planners, DMOs and/or private stakeholders. Hence:

Proposition 1: Sensory Place Identity includes visual (sight), auditory (sound), kinesthetic (touch) aroma (smell) and gustatory (taste) elements.

Experiencescapes

There is a consensus between scholars of experiential and sensory marketing that multisensory experiences are drivers of brand equity (Schmitt, 1999; Hultén, 2015) and brand love (Rodrigues, 2018; Swanson, 2017), having in account the right levels of sensory congruency (Helmefalk and Hultén, 2017) and sensory stimulation (Hultén, 2015). Sensorial brand strategies ‘create multi-sensory brand-experiences in enhancing brand identity as well as brand image’ (Hultén, 2017, p. 281). Indeed, the first definition of multisensory brand experience was coined by Hultén (2012) and highlights the significance of the human mind and senses in the value-generating process. More recently, Rodrigues (2018, p. 4) defined multisensory brand experience as ‘an emotional and cognitive response evoked by multisensory-brand related stimuli, along an interactive, continuous and experiential value co-creation process’. Rodrigues (2018) advocates that that multisensory brand experiences are hedonic in nature and are conveyed by multisensory design, multisensory marketing communications and atmospherics.

Experiences therefore become the core of product differentiation in the postmodern era (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus *et al.*, 1999) in which society seeks actively to consume experiences (Hultén, 2015). Consequently, this era is characterized by the quest for multiple forms of aesthetic and sensory pleasure, expressed by the valuation of body sensations and a slow, sensualistic temporality. In the same vein, Alves *et al.* (2016) argue that individuals feel the desire to experience different emotions, even if these experiences involve dangerous or even forbidden pleasures. Furthermore, individuals are polysensuality-oriented and thus have a

constant need to explore the world through all the senses. Hence, it can be argued that aestheticization has become a trend in postmodern societies in which individuals manifest neotribal behaviors by sharing feelings and collective emotions about brands and places (ibid).

In tourism research, the concept of 'touristscapes' (Edensor, 2007) gained importance among multisensory phenomenology scholars. 'Touristscapes' are linked to the notion of space that impacts upon those who dwell or move with it, through the influence of atmospheres, temperatures, sounds and smells (Edensor, 2007). As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013) note contemporary urban environments are characterized by a paradox, in which urban hyperesthesia (ex: streets and shopping malls) go in hand with an attempt towards sensory deprivation (ex: museums and art galleries). Hence, it is claimed that our body "moves along urban corridors of sensory direction, consciously or unconsciously obeying invitations and exclusions, sensory barriers or gestures of guilt-free overload" (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013, p. 38)

Indeed, a mix of sensory stimuli is already offered by architecture and landscapes, by smells that arise from bakeries, restaurants, nature or traffic, by sounds in the streets, festivals and pubs, by tastes materialized in gastronomy or by touch of materials, surfaces or technologies, among many others. According to Hanna and Rowley (2011), place brand experiences occur when people interact with a particular place in its several touch points and ascribe an emotional meaning to it as a result of pleasurable experiences. In another vein of research place brand experiences are conceptualized as *experiencescapes* in which people are able to experience landscapes that are strategically planned and designed to brand a place (Hall, 2008) and engage with its users and visitors emotionally. More specifically, Urry (2000) advocates that smell can be analysed in terms of diverse *smellscape*s that are prone to organize and mobilise people's feeling about particular places. As Low (2013) explains, the olfactive encounters in distinctive *sensoryscapes* (e.g. London, Paris or New Zealand) result in olfactive-affect bodily knowledge which is mapped through emotional associations. Hence, smell can be considered as an elicitor of memory and place, leading to aesthetic notions of nostalgia, familiarity and comfort that emerge when one recollects the embodied past.

In this context, place marketers have been urged to take on board a more holistic approach to place brands (Mainolfi and Marino, 2018), embracing conceptualizations of brand experiences (Barnes *et al.*, 2014; Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Mainolfi and Marino (2018, p. 9) stress that place

marketers should interpret the place brand as part of ‘an integrated territorial development strategy’. It is our contention that such an integrated place-based development strategy will (or at least should) necessarily include a strategy for sensory marketing as part of the place user / place visitor experience. Hence:

Proposition 2: Sensory Place Identity is conveyed from the experiencescape and influences multisensory destination image (2). The various aspects of the sensorial place identity can be created and manipulated by various enactment stakeholders (1) such as urban planners, private stakeholders, locals, and by DMOs. This can be communicated by key influencers (4) including official and unofficial sources.

Multisensory Place Image

Much of the extant literature on place brand image has focused on destinations that attract tourists. Destination image is usually conceptualized as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination (Crompton, 1979). As a multi-dimensional construct, destination image has been evaluated from different perspectives, namely cognitive, functional and affective aspects (e.g. Agapito *et al.*, 2013). More specifically, cognitive destination image is defined as the beliefs and knowledge that tourists have in regard to the destination’s tangible attributes (Pike and Ryan, 2004; do Valle *et al.*, 2012), such as its natural and cultural environment and all the unique experiences associated with a particular destination (Wang and Hsu, 2010; Lu *et al.*, 2015), whereas affective destination is represented by feelings that tourists hold about a destination (Lin *et al.*, 2007; Agapito *et al.*, 2013).

Although most of the tourism research conducted in the last four decades views destination image as a tri-dimensional concept, a multisensory approach has been gaining importance amongst scholars. For instance, Son and Pearce (2005) and Huang and Gross (2010) have conducted qualitative studies on how Australia’s multisensory images are stored and interpreted by tourists. Those studies demonstrate that Australia’s most memorable tactile images relate to touching native Australian animals, sand and trees, whereas the most memorable visual images are the Kangaroos, the Opera House and Koalas.. Additionally, a recent qualitative study conducted by Xiong *et al.* (2015) on Phoenix, Hunan Province, China, showed that the destination image is influenced by all the five human senses, although visual images received the most attention and tactile images the least attention.

As Rodrigues (2018) notes destinations are perceived by tourists as a complex amalgam of experiential and functional attributes. Consequently, the perceived destination images result either from indirect experiences with a destination (e.g. branding campaigns to promote a destination, international press, word-of-mouth, among many others) and direct experiences (e.g. personal and multisensory experiences in the destination as a result of a trip or a long stay). Building upon Brakus *et al.*'s (1999) four dimensions of brand experience, Beckman *et al.* (2013) measure the impact of sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral experiences on downtown success for both tourists and locals. According to the authors, sensory downtown place experiences delight their users and visitors through the five senses, whereas affective place experiences occur whenever people participate in activities which are ascribed personal meaning, share time with their loved ones or socialize with others in the place. Additionally, intellectual experiences challenge people to learn or think about a branded place, whereas behavioral experiences encompass different types of leisure activities connected to recreation or nightlife, at the same time reflecting peoples' lifestyles. It is worth noting that the non-representational theory in the field of geography suggests that human interaction with spaces and places goes beyond that which people perceive themselves to be within (Henshaw *et al.*, 2016) and concerns a wider embodied and unique experience that involves all the senses (*ibid.*). Considering that cities are rich sites of cultural and social memories, shaped by multisensory place experiences that contribute to the overall multisensory place image, we postulate that:

Proposition 3: Experiencescapes, designed or manipulated by enactment stakeholders and promoted by key influencers, determine how the multisensory place image is perceived.

Enactment Stakeholders

As noted by Henshaw *et al.* (2016), cities are characterized by both physical and sensory topographies. Creating an experiential city entails designing cities as *sensescapes* that simultaneously address the remits of urban planners, architects and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs). Urban planners and architects have a deep understanding of visual stimuli (e.g. lighting and appearance of buildings), aural stimuli (e.g. areas to deflect traffic sound) and tactile (e.g. pavements, surfaces and textures) within urban space (Henshaw *et al.*, 2016). Hence, the design of urban spaces impact on the creation of the place brand identity through its architecture and other urban spatial elements. Nevertheless, the urban area is the result of the co-creation process involving several stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, town

and shopping centre managers, retailers, locals and tourists (see, e.g. Dennis and Melewar, 2010; Dennis *et al.*, 2010). Grasse, in southern France, is a good example of how the entrepreneurial mindset of perfume makers contributes to market the town as the ‘World Perfume Capital’ (Henshaw *et al.*, 2016). More specifically, it can be claimed that the aroma of lavender and its olfactory place experience became part of the place brand identity. This is important as aroma enhances the longevity of memories (Krishna and Schwarz, 2014), thus contributing to an enduring brand. The effects of aroma on consumer behavior have received little research attention compared with other cues and further research has been called for (Krishna and Schwarz, 2014; Teller and Dennis, 2012).

Our framework proposes that the way place users perceive a place can have a motivating effect on the key stakeholders involved in the place branding process. The actions of these enactment stakeholders feed into (or should feed into) the actions of DMOs and the way they strategically brand a place, creating and communicating a strong, positive, and distinctive place identity to their target markets. Using this framework, DMOs should consider a holistic sensorial place identity that does not only concentrate on the visual. However, place users may not always develop a place brand image that is consistent with the identity the DMO is attempting to create. Key influencers are also now seen to play a large part in mediating the way a place brand image is perceived.

Key Influencers

Key influencers include the official sources communicating the place brand identity, including city governments and DMOs, social media, and other unofficial sources such as newspapers, travel writings, television programmes and films featuring particular places, often referred to in the tourism literature as ‘organic image sources’ as opposed to the ‘induced images’ provided by the more official sources (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Williams-Burnett, Skinner and Fallon, 2016).

The following two examples show how negative place brand images were perceived by these organic sources, which were totally at odds with the induced images communicated by official sources. However, in these cases, key stakeholders acted to address the problems and better re-align the perceived place images with the identity these places were attempting to create and communicate.

The Greek island of Corfu experienced problems with its disposal of rubbish during the mid 2010s. The problem reached breaking point in 2016 and 2017 when piles of rubbish lined the sides of the roads all across the island. Both locals and tourists were making their feelings about the place known across a range of social media, stories were being written in the online and offline press, with many photographs showing the very worst of the problems. Comments were being made about the bad smells arising from the rotting waste and concerns were being raised about the impact to physical health. Some potential visitors cancelled their planned holidays, and tour operators threatened to divert their travelers to other destinations if the problem was not addressed. In late 2017 and early 2018 local residents got together in many villages around the island to create and run (mostly with volunteers) ‘green points’, recycling centres that helped address the volume of waste that would otherwise have contributed to the rubbish problem. The Municipality eventually sorted the problem and cleaned away the rubbish mountains. By 2019 the community run recycling centres are well developed across the island, and the Municipality has established an online recycling platform designed to educate, raise awareness about and reward the public’s recycling efforts (Enimerosi.com, 2019).

The 2017 ‘summer of overtourism’ (Skift.com, 2017) also saw many news reports, photographs, and posts on social media showing the sheer volume of visitors overcrowding many European cities, having an effect on the physical experience of moving around these destinations for both locals and visitors alike. In many of these destinations, various measures have since been taken to reduce the numbers of visitors in total or at peak times (see Institute of Place Management, 2018, for detailed information on overtourism and the strategies places are introducing to cope with success).

However, sometimes the place identity and image do align, and it may be that DMOs and key stakeholders should better trust the other key influencers to communicate images that are consistent through the user generated content that is uploaded to various social media platforms. Indeed it has been posited that such organic image sources are even more influential on a place’s target markets than those provided by official sources (Skinner, 2018).

Summary

The sensorial place brand identity framework we now present (Figure 1) focuses on city brands that are strategically planned as urban *experiencescapes* and branded through the five senses.

By foregrounding the role of multisensory encounters as mediators of the city experience, and exploring how sensorial place identity bears upon a bottom-up process involving all stakeholders in the co-creation process, this framework provides a dynamic and strategic means for enactment stakeholders (urban planners, private stakeholders and locals) and key influencers (official sources, social media and other unofficial sources) to enhance the polysensoriality of the city and to influence positively how the multisensory place image is perceived.

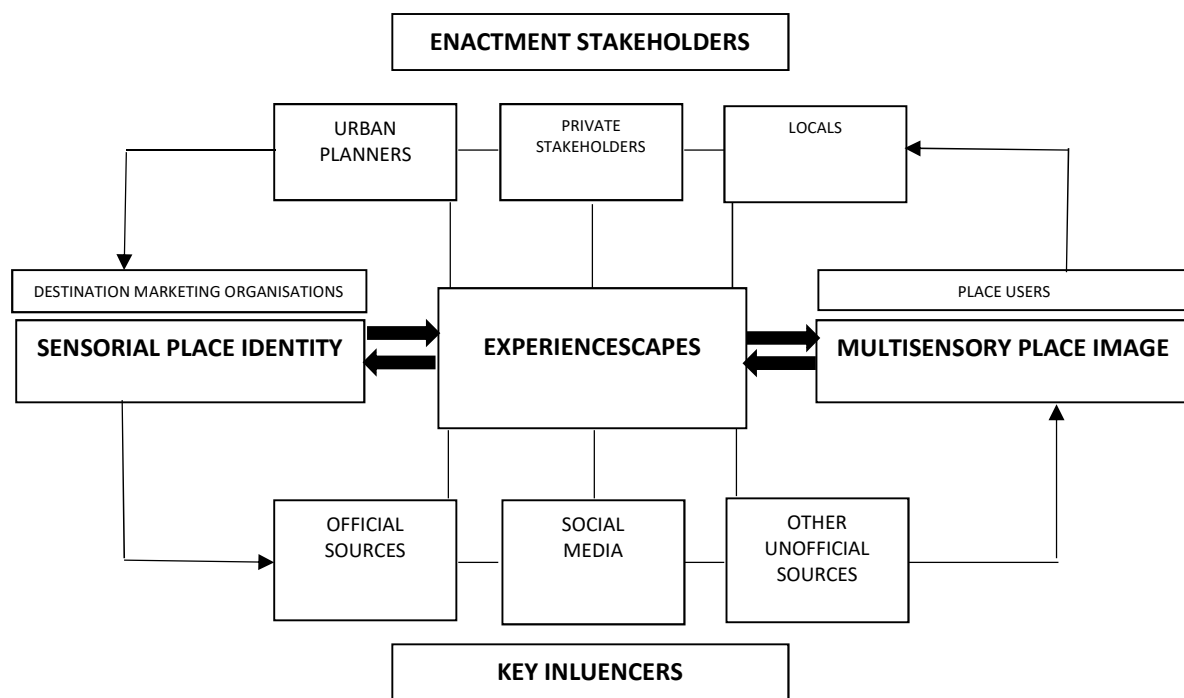


Figure 1 – Sensorial Place Identity Framework

Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to contribute to the place branding literature by nuancing the conceptual opposition between a multisensory approach to place brand identity and the place brand visual identity anchored mainly on cultural and heritage aspects of cities, that is still dominant in extant literature. Furthermore, the paper also discusses the relevance of the bottom-up approach to place branding that involves several enactment stakeholders and key influences as co-creators in the process of staging and managing experiencescapes as well as delivering sensory place branding messages based on a strong and unique place brand identity.

To achieve this goal, this paper proposes a provisional framework linking sensorial place identity, experiencescapes and multisensory place image. In line with Adams and Guy (2007), our paper responds to the need of using the five senses strategically in forming and shaping the experience of the city, beyond its economic, political, social, technological and cultural dimensions. In this respect, this paper attempts to reconcile the fragmented and varied literature in the fields of sensory marketing and place identity, by considering a holistic view of place branding. In this respect, it is proposed to explore the sensuous dimensions of cities in the modern life, by considering cities as sites of human experience comprised by memories, emotions and social relationships mediated through sound, smell, touch, taste, as well as sight (Low, 2015). As a conceptual device, the proposed framework facilitates the creation of distinct place governance strategies, thus responding to Medway *et al.* (2016) who advocated that place managers need to consider the nature and meaning of multisensory experiences that individuals feel in various places. This holistic view of place branding stresses the relevance of exploring the sensuous dimensions of cities in the modern life, by considering cities as sites of human experience comprised by memories, emotions and social relationships mediated through the five human senses (Low, 2015). Connected to this, our framework sheds light on the co-creation role of enactment stakeholders and key influencers in designing and promote cities as an active locus of experiential meanings mediated by the five senses. In particular, these actors are proposed as central to convey the sensory elements that form the sensuous character of cities.

Implications for management

This framework can be an additional valuable tool that can be used by various stakeholders working individually or in cooperation in the place branding process. Such tools are recognised by Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009) as helping places achieve competitive advantage, especially in the highly competitive city place branding arena. The framework can also act as a strategic tool that DMOs can use to create a distinctive and competitive sensorial place identity that can be communicated across multiple touchpoints, engaging multisensorial experiences of the city (Rodrigues, 2018).

The growing interest of tourists in visiting places that stimulate their senses is an important engine for destination marketing organisations in the era of consumption experiences. This shift challenges DMOs to co-create place brand strategies that add value from a sensory

perspective. In fact, it is crucial to understand which visual, sound, touch, taste and smell dimensions of places should be embedded in the place multisensory identity. In other words, how should the sensorial aspects of a city be combined to create a unique value proposition that is representative of the sensuous DNA of a city? The new approach to sensory place branding, also implies that place managers should focus on staging or developing experiencescapes that reflect the sensorial identity of a city and contribute to a positive and distinctive multisensory place image and thus influence visitors' intentions to revisit and recommend (Foroudi *et al.*, 2018; Mainolfi and Marino, 2018). Thus the framework can also be utilized to address negative sensory experiences in crisis management situations as outlined by the examples shown in this article.

The framework is currently being proposed as a concept. It would be interesting to see its application in a city and used by a DMO and other various place brand stakeholders. However, like many other articles that consider place marketing and branding, this paper has focused on cities and the urban place (Warnaby, 2009). Further research may consider the relevance of this framework to different types of places including smaller towns and villages, and also rural environments.

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